

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PARIS 25209

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, FR
SUBJECT: THE MAJORITY AS KATZENJAMMER KIDS

SUMMARY. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A YEAR AND A HALF, THE MAJORITY PARTIES IN FRANCE ARE LOOKING WITH A TOUCH OF OPTIMISM TOWARDS THE 1978 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. BUT THE SAME PROBLEMS THAT HAVE PLAGUED THE MAJORITY SINCE GISCARD'S ELECTION IN 1974 REMAIN BASICALLY UNALTERED. BEYOND THE BICKERING OVER PACTS, MANIFESTOS AND PROGRAMS ARE A KIND OF DEATH STRUGGLE BEING WAGED BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND HIS FORMER PRIME MINISTER JACQUES CHIRAC. THE PRESIDENT HAS A CERTAIN EDGE MERELY BY VIRTUE OF HIS OFFICE, BUT THE LIBERAL PARTIES THAT SUPPORT HIM SEEM INCAPABLE OF GETTING THEIR ACTS TOGETHER. MEANWHILE PRIME MINISTER BARRE, WHO TO DATE HAS BEEN CONCENTRATING MAINLY ON ECONOMIC MATTERS, WILL SOON BE OBLIGED TO ENTER THE FRAY. IN THIS CONTEXT IT CAN BE SAID THAT IN ONE YEAR IN OFFICE HE APPEARS TO HAVE ASSUMED THE FIGURE OF A POLITICIAN. BUT EVEN A MAN AS LEVEL-HEADED

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AS BARRE WILL BE HARD PUT TO DISPEL THE BITTER RIVALRIES AMONG THE MAJORITY LEADERS, RIVALRIES WHICH WILL CONTINUE EVEN SHOULD THE LEFT LOSE THE FORTHCOMING LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. THERE'S SOMETHING IN THE AIR THAT HAS NOT BEEN PRESENT IN FRANCE SINCE THE SERIOUS SETBACKS THE RIGHT

ENCOUNTERED IN THE MARCH 1976 CANTONAL ELECTIONS: THE BELIEF BY THE MAJORITY THAT IT HAS A GOOD CHANCE AFTER ALL IN THE 1978 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. DESPITE POLLS THAT CONTINUE GIVING THE LEFT AS MUCH AS 54 PERCENT OF THE VOTE, DESPITE THE SHELLACKING THE LEFT GAVE IN LAST MARCH'S MAYORAL ELECTIONS, DESPITE THE LACKLUSTER ECONOMIC SITUATION -- PEOPLE ON BOTH SIDES OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM ARE SAYING THAT THE LEFT MAY HAVE PEAKED TOO SOON, THAT THE MAJORITY IS WORKING THINGS OUT AT LEAST ON THE SURFACE, AND THAT THE 2 OR 3 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE THAT IS FLOATING LEFT IS RECUPERABLE. MAJORITY POLITICIANS DO NOT GO BEYOND THE EVENTUALITY OF A NARROW VICTORY IN 1978 AND THE SOCIAL UNREST THAT COULD FOLLOW VERY WELL; THEY ARE UNDERSTANDABLY CONTENT THAT FOR THE FIRST TIME IN EIGHTEEN MONTHS THEIR PROSPECTS ARE LOOKING UP. BENEATH THE SURFACE, HOWEVER, MANY OF THE SAME TROUBLESOME UNDERCURRENTS THAT HAVE EXISTED SINCE GISCARD'S ELECTION REMAIN.

2. WHY THE OPTIMISM?: EARLY IN AUGUST A RUMOR CIRCULATED IN PARIS -- ONCE AGAIN -- THAT THE PRESIDENT WOULD DISSOLVE PARLIAMENT AND HOLD EARLY ELECTIONS. WHAT WAS INTERESTING WERE THE REASONS GIVEN:

- A) DISCORD WITHIN THE LEFT AND THE SUBSEQUENT IMPRESSION MADE ON HESITANT VOTERS;
- B) RISING POPULARITY OF PRIME MINISTER BARRE;

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- C) THE "CORDIAL" ATMOSPHERE OF THE MAJORITY PARTIES' ELECTORAL NEGOTIATIONS.

MANY FELT THAT SUCH A CONVERGENCE OF CIRCUMSTANCES ARGUED STRONGLY IN FAVOR OF EARLY ELECTIONS. THE MAJORITY NEGOTIATIONS, INITIATED FOR THE PURPOSE OF DECIDING WHO WILL RUN WHERE IN 1978, ARE STILL UNDER WAY (THE SIXTH SESSION TERMINATED AUGUST 24). BUT OBSERVERS WHO CITED THEM AS PART PROOF OF THE LOGIC OF HOLDING EARLY ELECTIONS OVERLOOKED THE DYNAMICS FOR STRIFE AT WORK AMONG MAJORITY LEADERS.

3. THE MANIFESTO...: ON JULY 19 FOUR OF THE FIVE MAJOR PARTIES OF THE MAJORITY ISSUED A COMMUNIQUE (SERVANSCHREIBER'S RADICAL SOCIALISTS REFUSED) UNDERSCORING THEIR "PROFOUND ACCORD ON THE PRINCIPLES AND INSTITUTIONS OF THE FIFTH REPUBLIC," AND OUTLINING ELECTORAL STRATEGY TO BE FOLLOWED IN 1978. CHIRAC MANAGED TO KEEP OUT ANY MENTION OF A MAJORITY PROGRAM, WHICH THE OTHER PARTY LEADERS WANTED. THIS COMMUNIQUE OPENED THE DOOR TO THE CURRENT SERIES OF NEGOTIATIONS, WHICH WILL PRESUMABLY LEAD TO A MANIFESTO SOMETIME IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS. THE MANIFESTO ITSELF, A SKETCH OF COMMON PRINCIPLES AND

OBJECTIVES TO WHICH THE PARTIES MAY EVENTUALLY REFER

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DURING THE ELECTION, IS INTENDED TO PROVIDE A RALLYING
POINT FOR LEADERS AS POLITICALLY REMOVED FROM ONE
ANOTHER AS CHIRAC AND CDS PRESIDENT LECANUET.
CHIRAC WOULD GO NO FURTHER IN ASSOCIATING HIMSELF WITH
THE GISCARDO-CENTRISTS.

4. AND THE PROGRAM -- FOR SOME TIME IT WAS BELIEVED
BARRE WOULD DRAFT A PROGRAM COMPLEMENTING THE MANIFESTO.
A KIND OF WAYS AND MEANS PLAN, IT WOULD HAVE LISTED
CONCRETE MEASURES TO BE FOLLOWED BY GOF IN ATTAINING THE
OBJECTIVES AND GOALS IN THE MANIFESTO. NOW BARRE HAS
DECLARED HE HAS NO SUCH INTENTION, AND IT LOOKS AS IF
EACH PARTY WILL COME UP WITH ITS OWN MINI PROGRAM. CHI-
RAC BASED HIS DETERMINATION NOT TO GO BEYOND A
MANIFESTO ON THE CLAIM THAT A GOVERNMENT PROGRAM WOULD
TIE GOF TO THE PARTIES AND HERALD A RETURN TO THE
FOURTH REPUBLIC. HIS REAL REASON OF COURSE IS THAT IT
WOULD HAVE BACKED THE RPR INTO A LEGISLATIVE CORNER AND
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PREVENTED THE MOVEMENT FROM DISASSOCIATING ITSELF FROM ANY FUTURE GOF SETBACKS, ELECTORAL OR OTHERWISE. IN OTHER WORDS, NOTHING HAS CHANGED SINCE CHIRAC'S RESIGNATION AS PM EXACTLY ONE YEAR AGO; HE IS STILL DETERMINED TO KEEP HIS DISTANCE FROM GISCARD'S GOAL OF A LIBERAL, ADVANCED SOCIETY, AND PREFERS TO BASE HIS PARTY'S CAMPAIGN STRATEGY ON THE CLASSIC DIVISION OF LEFT AND RIGHT.

5. RPR ELECTORAL TACTICS: THIS STRATEGY ORIGINALLY MEANT GETTING RID OF DEAD WOOD IN THE RPR AND FIELDING HARD-HITTING YOUNG NEWCOMERS IN AS MANY DISTRICTS AS POSSIBLE. ADMITTEDLY, CHIRAC HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO INDUCE AS MANY OLD TIMERS IN THE RPR TO STEP DOWN AS HE WOULD LIKE. BUT HE HAS SUCCEEDED IN BRINGING REPUBLICAN PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL SOISSON AND JEAN LECANUET AROUND TO HIS THINKING ON CANDIDACIES, NAMELY PRIMARIES IN THE FIRST ROUND IN TWO-THIRDS OF THE DISTRICTS AND A SINGLE MAJORITY CANDIDATE IN THE REMAINING ONE-THIRD. THIS REPRESENTS A CHANGE FOR THE CENTER AND THE PR WHICH, TO USE GISCARD'S PHRASE, HAD HOPED TO PREVENT "WILD CANDIDACIES." WHAT HAS STRUCK SOME OBSERVERS IS CHIRAC'S CLEVER MANAGEMENT OF THESE NEGOTIATIONS WITH HIS PARTNERS, WINNING HIS POINT WITHOUT APPEARING OVERLY DEMANDING OR INTRANSIGENT.

6. THE GISCARDIANS VERSUS THE RPR: THE REPUBLICANS, SINCE THEIR REORGANIZATION MAY 21 (PARIS 15500) HAVE HAD A DIFFICULT JOB GETTING OFF THE GROUND. SOISSON APPEARS FLIGHTY AND LIGHTWEIGHT, TOO EASILY INFLUENCED BY THE LAST PERSON HE'S SPOKEN TO, WHETHER IT'S CHIRAC OR THE PRESIDENT. PARTY ADHESIONS ARE NOT ARRIVING IN THE NUMBER EXPECTED, AND THERE ARE TOO MANY TROUBLESOME BARONS

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LURKING ABOUT. ULTRA CONSERVATIVE ALAIN GRIOTTERAY, RESPONSIBLE FOR PREPARING THE ELECTIONS, IS ONE OF THE THREE NATIONAL DELEGATES; FORMER MINISTERS PONIATOWSKI AND D'ORNANO ARE SNEAKING BACK IN THROUGH THE SIDE DOOR, THOUGH THEY'LL FEIGN KEEPING THEIR DISTANCE. OF THE TWO PARTIES OSTENSIBLY ON THE SAME WAVELENGTH AS THE PR, THE CENTER FOR SOCIAL DEMOCRATS SIMPLY DOESN'T HAVE THE TROOPS, AND THE RADICAL SOCIALISTS, BESIDES BEING TINY, ARE DISTANCING THEMSELVES FROM THE REST OF THE MAJORITY (SEE BELOW). THIS LEAVES THE RPR, WITH ITS MACHINE IN THE TOUR MONT-PARNASSE, ITS DYNAMISM, ITS GLORIOUS RECENT

PAST, ITS BUCKETS OF MONEY, AND -- MOST OF ALL -- ITS
TROOPS. EVEN IF THE FIGURE OF 400,000 ADHERENTS CLAIMED

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BY PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL JEROME MONOD IS EXAGGERATED,
NO OTHER MAJORITY PARTY SEEMS ABLE TO STAND UP TO THE
RPR.

7. JJSS AND COMPANY: AND CHIRAC IS NOT THE MAJORITY'S
ONLY HEADACHE. RADICAL SOCIALIST PRESIDENT JEAN-JACQUES
SERVAN-SCHREIBER RECENTLY LAMBASTED MAJORITY PARLIAMEN-
TARIANS FOR BEING NO LONGER REPRESENTATIVE OF THEIR
"EVER MORE LIBERAL" ELECTORATE. BY REFUSING TO PARTICI-
PATE IN THE ELECTORAL NEGOTIATIONS, JJSS HOPED TO SLIGHT
HIS ARCH-ENEMY JACQUES CHIRAC, WHO WAS UNDOUBTEDLY THE
STAR OF THE MEETING THAT PRODUCED THE INITIAL COMMUNIQUE.
HE KNEW IN ADVANCE THAT CHIRAC WOULD PARTICIPATE. IN
VIEW OF JJSS' CLOSE RELATIONS WITH THE PRESIDENT, HE IS
SEEN AS THE MAN WHO SAYS THINGS THE PRESIDENT THINKS
BUT CANNOT UTTER OPENLY. SOME BELIEVE THAT JJSS, BY
ACTING IN SUCH A WAY, CREATES THE IMPRESSION OF OFFERING
A REAL ALTERNATIVE TO MAJORITY VOTERS TIRED OF BOTH GIS-
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CARD AND CHIRAC. IT IS MORE PROBABLE, HOWEVER, THAT JJSS' ANTICS ARE INTERPRETED AS ONE MORE EXAMPLE OF THE MAJORITY'S SEEMING INABILITY TO OVERCOME THE PERSONALITY PROBLEMS AND RIVALRIES OF ITS LEADERS.

8. THE PRESIDENT: SHORTLY AFTER HIS ELECTION IN 1974, GISCARD MADE CLEAR THAT HIS OVERALL STRATEGY WOULD BE TO DISTANCE HIMSELF FROM RECALCITRANT GAULLISTS AND FORM A NEW, LIBERAL MAJORITY. IT CAN BE SAID WITH CERTAINTY THAT THIS STRATEGY, THOUGH EMINENTLY UNSUCCESSFUL TO DATE, HAS NOT CHANGED. HE GIVES HIS BLESSING, TACIT OR OTHERWISE, TO EVERY EFFORT TO FORM A "LIBERAL" PARTY THAT WOULD PULL VOTES OFF FROM THE LEFT (THE MOVEMENT OF SOCIAL LIBERALS, FRENCH DEMOCRACY, THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS, ETC.). HE RECEIVES A 25-YEAR OLD PR CANDIDATE AT THE ELYSEE TO HELP HIM IN HIS FORTHCOMING CAMPAIGN AGAINST GAULLIST BARON DE LIPKOWSKI. HE PUTS THE ELECTORAL SERVICE OF THE MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR AT THE SERVICE OF LIBERAL CANDIDATES AND RPR DISSIDENTS, BUT REFUSES IT TO CHIRACIANS. ELYSEE STAFFERS SAY THAT HIS ANTIPATHY TO CHIRAC IS SO DEVELOPED THAT IT CONSTITUTES, IN AND OF ITSELF, AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN A NUMBER OF HIS DOMESTIC POLITICAL DECISIONS. OBVIOUSLY THIS ATTITUDE HAS A DELETERIOUS EFFECT ON THE MAJORITY AS A WHOLE.

9. THE PRIME MINISTER: CAUGHT SQUARELY IN THE MIDDLE BETWEEN CHIRAC AND GISCARD IS PRIME MINISTER BARRE. THOUGH HIS OVERALL POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY SEEMS CLOSER TO THAT OF THE PRESIDENT THAN TO CHIRAC'S, BARRE SEES THE LATTER REGULARLY AND CONFERS WITH HIM ON CERTAIN DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES. ALTHOUGH BARRE'S ECONOMIC PLANS HAVE YET TO BRING ABOUT ANY APPRECIABLE IMPROVEMENTS ON THE INFLATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT FRONTS, THE

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FRENCH TRADE BALANCE HAS IMPROVED AND THE FRANC HAS BEEN STEADY SINCE BARRE TOOK THE HELM. FURTHERMORE, BARRE IS GRADUALLY ACQUIRING, ON THIS THE ANNIVERSARY OF HIS FIRST YEAR IN OFFICE, THE STATURE OF A POLITICIAN. IT IS A FOREGONE CONCLUSION THAT SOMETIME WITHIN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS HE WILL HAVE TO PUT ON HIS GLOVES AND CLIMB IN THE ELECTORAL BOXING RING. WITH A COUPLE OF NOTABLE EXCEPTIONS, HE HAS THUS FAR MANAGED TO AVOID GETTING HIMSELF INVOLVED; BUT THE FACT THAT HE WILL RUN FOR AN ASSEMBLY SEAT (PROBABLY FROM LYON) MEANS HE CAN

NO LONGER KEEP HIS EYES FIXED MAINLY ON ECONOMICS. UNFORTUNATELY THE GISCARD/CHIRAC RIVALRY MEANS THAT SOME OF BARRE'S PROPOSALS MAY SUFFER, SINCE IF CHIRAC ALLOWED BARRE TO LOOK TOO GOOD, SOME OF THE CREDIT WOULD INEVITABLY GO TO GISCARD. NONETHELESS BARRE ENJOYS INCREASING POPULARITY NATIONWIDE AND IS BECOMING A POLITICAL FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH IN HIS OWN RIGHT.

10. THE FALL PARLIAMENTARY SESSION: GISCARD WANTED TO CONVOKE A SPECIAL PARLIAMENTARY MEETING AT VERSAILLES THIS SEPTEMBER FOR THE PURPOSE OF AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION. IN QUESTION WAS THE REVISION OF ARTICLE 25 TO ALLOW FORMER PARLIAMENTARIANS WHO WERE CALLED INTO GOVERNMENT TO RETAKE THEIR ASSEMBLY SEATS AUTOMATICALLY SIX MONTHS AFTER LEAVING THEIR MINISTERIAL POSTS. THE RPR POOH-POOHED THE WHOLE IDEA, CLAIMING THAT NOW WAS NOT THE TIME TO FOOL AROUND WITH SMALL POTATOES AND ELECTORAL GIMMICKS (IT WOULD HAVE ALLOWED FOUR MINISTERS PLANNING TO RUN IN THIS FALL'S SENATE ELECTION TO RETAIN THEIR GOVERNMENT PORTFOLIOS). THIS ACT ON CHIRAC'S PART IS INDICATIVE OF HIS ABILITY TO STYMIE GOV LEGISLATIVE POLICY AND MARK HIS PARTY'S DISTANCE. WE CAN EXPECT SIMILAR TACTICS THIS FALL, MOST LIKELY ON CERTAIN

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BUDGET QUESTIONS, WHERE THE RPR CAN THROW DARTS INSTEAD OF SPEARS, BUT ALSO ON THE EC PARLIAMENT AND FRENCH RATIFICATION OF THE JAMAICA MONETARY ACCORDS, SHOULD THEY COME UP.

11. CONCLUSION: THE GAME CONTINUES. WITH HIS PRESIDENTIAL AMBITIONS AN OPEN SECRET, CHIRAC CANNOT AFFORD TO BE OUTFLANKED BY THE PRESIDENT, WHO AFTER ALL STILL RETAINS MORE TRUMPS THAN HIS FORMER PM. MEANWHILE SOME OF FRANCE'S MAJOR PROBLEMS REMAIN UNRESOLVED BECAUSE EVERYONE IS HEDGING HIS BETS ON THE MARCH ELECTIONS. THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES, SOME OF WHICH GISCARD HAS ATTEMPTED TO LESSEN, REMAIN. IF MAJORITY LEADERS ARE IN BASIC AGREEMENT OVER THE TYPE OF SOCIETY THEY WANT -- PCF LEADER GEORGES MARCHAIS' TWEED-LEDEE/TWEEDLEDUM THEORY -- THEY SEEM LOCKED INTO DIVERGENT TACTICAL POSITIONS BASED ON MUTUAL SUSPICION, OLD RIVALRIES AND PERSONAL AMBITION. FUNDAMENTALLY, THERE

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IS LITTLE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THIS SITUATION WOULD DISAPPEAR IN THE EVENT OF A MAJORITY VICTORY IN 1978. THE MAJORITY MAY RECUPERATE THE SWING VOTE, AS THEY NOW OPTIMISTICALLY FEEL THEY CAN, AND GET BACK INTO THE ASSEMBLY WITH A 10 TO 20 SEAT MARGIN IN THE SPRING, BUT IT'S A SORRY STATE OF AFFAIRS TO OFFER AN ANXIOUS ELECTORATE.
HARTMAN

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